

Commercial Building  
9 North Commerce Street  
Mobile  
Mobile County  
Alabama

HABS No. ALA-791

HABS  
ALA,  
49-MOBI,  
140-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. ALA-791

## COMMERCIAL BUILDING

HABS

ALA,

49-MOBI,

140-

Location:

7  
9 N. Commerce Street, southwest corner of Commerce Street and Exchange Alley, Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama.  
Geographic Location Code: 01-2100-097

Present Use:

Demolished in 1968 for the Water Street Urban Renewal Project.

Statement of  
Significance:

Before the Civil War, three old adjoining buildings were renovated, creating the single existing structure. The facades were reworked, unifying the exterior, cast-iron decorative elements were added, and the building assumed the appearance of a typical mid-nineteenth-century commercial structure in Mobile's active waterfront district.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Before 1835
2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: Two of the three original buildings which make up the existing structure were owned and probably constructed by Judge Henry Hitchcock sometime before 1835. The third building, which faces Exchange Alley at the rear of the other two, also seems to have been constructed during the 1830's, since it also appears on the Lewis Troost Map of c. 1840. The lot upon which the two Hitchcock buildings stand measured 61'-5" x 71'-6" in 1835; when all three properties were joined, probably about 1852, the lot was expanded to 61'-5" x 110'-3", very nearly the same size as when the lot was acquired for urban renewal in 1968. The chains of title to the property are unclear, resulting in a lawsuit early in the twentieth century. Hitchcock sold the property, including "two stores", to T.W. McCoy in 1835 as part of a sale involving \$52,000.00. McCoy held the property until 1852, when he sold the stores and land for \$21,000.00 to Ovid Mazange, who also must have acquired the additional property at about the same time. In 1866, the total property (three buildings) was mortgaged by Celestine Eslava, one of Mazange's heirs, and passed, in 1874, to Mary J. Elmore as a result of a decree. Kate McDonnell and heirs owned the buildings from 1904 until 1936, when they were sold to Autry Greer & Sons, the last owners. Since the 1830's, these buildings were continuously occupied by various wholesale and retail grocery and feed companies, as were other buildings in the immediate vicinity.
4. Builder or contractor, suppliers: Unknown

5. Alterations and additions: Sometime after Ovid Mazange acquired the property in 1852, the three buildings were renovated and the facades completely reworked to give the appearance of a single structure. Openings were cut in the party walls and the necessary alterations were made to the roofs, although the basic structural elements remained unchanged. When the renovation was completed, probably about 1860, nothing of the original structures could be seen from the exterior; even the three distinct gabled roofs were obscured by parapets.

ALA

49-Mob1

125  
145-

B. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views:

Bird's Eye View of the City of Mobile, Alabama, 1873,  
Cincinnati: Ehrgotte T. Krebs, 1873.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Lewis Troost Map (c. 1840), City Hall, Mobile

Mobile Deed Books, Probate Court Record Division,  
Mobile County

b. Secondary and published sources:

Southern and Southwestern Surveying and Publishing  
Company, City Atlas of Mobile, Alabama, from Actual  
Surveys and Records, Baltimore: G.M. Hopkins, 1878.

Prepared by Linda Carroll  
Student Historian  
August 29, 1966  
and  
Charles A. Herrington  
Architectural Historian  
National Park Service  
August 14, 1972

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: After renovations about 1860, and the addition of cast-iron details and decoration in the Classical Revival style, this structure became a typical example of mid-nineteenth-century commercial buildings in Mobile.
2. Condition of fabric: The building was in fair condition before demolition in 1968.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: In the renovation of c. 1860, this two story building became "L"-shaped with a small light court in the southwest corner of the property. It measures 60'-6" (eight bays) on the east front and 102'-0" (originally eleven bays) on the north side. ALA  
69.10001  
123.140
2. Foundations: Not accessible.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: On the east front, the stuccoed brick wall of the second floor is carried by seven cast-iron piers that support a simple entablature. The faces of the piers have round-headed inset vertical panels and the capitals are incised with an egg-and-dart motif. The plain frieze of the entablature appears to be modern cement stucco, while the moulded cornice is original. This same distinction between old and new materials also occurs on the north side, indicating that the first story of both facades should be ascribed to a later renovation, and the style of the entrance, windows, and even the piers indicates that these elements probably date from the 1920's. The three western bays of the north facade, however, are marked by an arcade on the first story with cast-iron Corinthian columns and arches faced with an acanthus band. Cast-iron console brackets above the columns are identical to those which support the window hoods on the second floor and it may be assumed that this arcaded entrance is original to the c. 1860 renovation and may also reflect the original appearance of the first story on the east front. The cornice of the arcade, however, is at a slightly higher level than the adjoining cornice which forms a belt course around the remainder of the building; this irregularity may have resulted out of some necessity when two facades were incorporated into one in the original renovation.
4. Structural system, framing: There is a full-height brick bearing wall, running east to west, midway between the two exterior walls. These three walls support two sets of trusses that are similar in construction to those of the Seamen's Bethel (ALA-791). Composed of heavy timbers with an iron tension rod connecting the top and bottom chords at the center, the trusses are independent of the roof framing except for the single heavy purlin at the mid-point of the slope of the top chords. The purlins are braced on the top chord by a heavy triangular wedge. Another interesting framing feature occurs at the top of the brick walls, which are corbelled. Horizontal members project out from the walls approximately 3'-0" at 18" intervals. At the free end, they are tenoned into a header, parallel to the walls, with the tenons extending approximately 6" beyond the header.
5. Porches, stoops: There is a low continuous stuccoed brick stoop with cast-iron treads at the entrance.
6. Chimneys: There is one stuccoed chimney on the western end of the north wall, and a "T"-headed terra cotta flue on the east end of the same wall.

AIA  
49-McB

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: On the east front, there is a <sup>125</sup> doorway in the center bay with double doors of beveled glass set in a simple wooden frame. On the north side, there are panelled wooden double doors set between the piers of the arcade. The arches above the doors were originally filled with glazed transoms and cast-iron grilles.
- b. Windows and shutters: Windows on the first floor of the east front are large single-lights that are set in cast-iron frames and fill the entire width of the bays. Narrow transoms with rounded ends occur above the windows. All windows on the second floor are identical, consisting of double-hung wooden sash with two-over-three lights and slightly arched heads. Above each window is a cast-iron hood supported on foliated console brackets. The inside face of the hood is decorated with an acanthus band and a stylized keystone projects slightly from the center.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Two gabled roofs span the two sections of the building lengthwise, with another gabled roof at right angles spanning the wing forming the three western bays. This wing does not extend the full width of the building, and a small court is formed in the southwest corner. The roofs are covered by modern asphalt shingles, and they define the sizes and shapes of the original separate buildings before they were converted into a single structure in the c. 1860 renovation.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The east elevation is crowned by an entablature with panelled frieze, dentils, and a cornice supported by simple grooved brackets. Above the cornice is a low stuccoed brick parapet with slightly pedimented sections that rise over the center of each half of the facade. Each of these sections masks the gabled roof behind, and the same motif is repeated on the western end of the north side, although the entablature on the north side consists only of a smooth frieze and a simple moulded cornice.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The first floor has been completely remodeled and no evidence of the original arrangement exists. On the second floor, each of the three original buildings is now a single open space. The location of fireplace remains indicates that there were several large offices on this floor.
2. Stairways: There are no stairways, and no evidence of their original location was found. Access to the second floor is

now gained through the building across the alley via a covered bridge.

- ALA  
41. 1861  
140-
3. Flooring: Flooring consists of wide pine boards.
  4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls were originally all plastered on lathing and furring strips, with nailer strips set in every thirteenth brick joint. Lath and plaster marks indicate that the ceilings were also plastered.
  5. Doorways and doors: Most of the doorways have been filled in and others have been cut into the walls.
  6. Special decorative features, trim: Only fragments of the original simple moulded trim remains. It is interesting to note that the interior frames of the second-floor windows have square heads, while the sash are slightly arched. This probably indicates that the interior frames are original and were not altered during the c. 1860 renovation when new windows were installed.
  7. Notable hardware: There is an unusually large overhead bolt latch at one of the doorways.
  8. Mechanical equipment:
    - a. Heating: The only evidence of fireplaces is chimney breastworks on the walls. There seem to have been three on the north wall, one near the west end of the interior bearing wall, and two on the south wall.
    - b. Lighting: Modern electricity has been installed.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building is on the southwest corner of Commerce Street and Exchange Alley, facing east on Commerce Street. It is in the center of a small wholesale and retail grocery district.
2. Outbuildings: There are no outbuildings, but there is a small paved courtyard on the southwest corner of the property.

Prepared by Woodrow W. Wilkins  
Supervising Architect  
National Park Service  
July 22, 1966  
and  
Charles A. Herrington  
Architectural Historian  
National Park Service  
August 16, 1972

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

ALA  
44. MOBI  
123

These records were prepared as a cooperative project during the summer of 1966 between the Historic American Buildings Survey and various agencies, organizations, and individuals of the City of Mobile. The Historic American Buildings Survey supplied the project supervisor, Woodrow W. Wilkins, and three draughtsmen, Carl J. Rosenberg (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Michael R. Foil (Auburn University), and Lowell K. West (University of Kentucky). One draughtsman, Elbert L. Coleman (Alabama A & M), was provided by the Mobile Housing Board, which agency administers urban renewal. The services of an additional draughtsman, James Eley, specifically designated as an architectural student from Auburn University, were made possible by contributions from numerous local architects and businessmen. The Historic Mobile Preservation Society, in agreement with the History Department of Springhill College, provided a student historian, Linda Carroll. Office space was supplied by the City of Mobile through the City Planning Commission. Roy Thigpen, a local photographer, was contracted to supply the photographs. All local arrangements were made by the Mobile Historic Development Commission, Mrs. Nancy N. Holmes, President. The project was edited during the summer of 1972 by Charles A. Herrington, Architectural Historian, in a cooperative effort between the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Mobile Historic Development Commission.